

NATURAL FLEA CONTROL

The summer of 1995 was one of the worst in terms of weather. In addition to the intense heat, insects were on the rampage. In my frequent phone conversations with breeders and owners, it appeared that everyone from New England to California was fighting a losing battle with fleas and/or ticks.

My personal war began in early June. While routinely bathing my two housedogs I discovered they were infested with fleas. Mortified, I ran to the local hardware store and spent over \$50 on chemicals for the yard, house and dogs. One week and three rainstorms later, the flea problem was no better, so I dished out more hard-earned money and again sprayed and bathed dogs. When it became clear I was going nowhere fast and the dogs began to look glassy-eyed from all the toxic chemicals, I hoped for a better way. The three-step program I followed was phenomenally successful.

First, I hired a local company to dust the carpets with a natural boron powder that is completely nontoxic to animals and humans and will eradicate most hard-shelled insects. It is worked into the deep fibers of the carpet where it kills fleas and larvae. The technician treats all carpets (including closet areas) and upholstered furniture. The treatment is guaranteed for a year, even if the carpet is shampooed! In the first week or two, the fleas started hopping in desperation to escape the powder, but by four weeks they had completely disappeared. In my part of the country, this whole-house treatment costs around \$150 and is worth every nickel.

Stage two involved killing the outdoor fleas. I chose a new product from Farnam that has no chemicals, only tiny worms that kill fleas before they become adults by burrowing into the ground and eating 90 percent of the flea larvae within the first 24 hours. They live until they run out of prey, then they biodegrade. They are not toxic to plants, animals or humans. [These are called nematodes, naturally occurring microorganisms that live in soil.]

Follow the instructions carefully to properly prepare the ground before spraying and to ensure proper distribution of the spray. Use a no-clog sprayer such as Miracle Grow because normal hose-end sprayers will clog badly. I treated the exercise yards, the grassy area around our pool where the housedogs exercise and the gravel kennel runs. Within two days, the fleas were gone. I only found one or two the rest of the summer.

The product is sold under several names (I used Bio Flea Halt) by veterinarians and wholesale suppliers at extremely reasonable prices.

The final step was treating the dogs themselves so they are less likely to pick up fleas from other areas. Instead of chemicals I chose Avon's Skin-So-Soft, which has been proven to deter fleas, mosquitoes and other insects. I routinely bathe my dogs every two to four weeks if they're not being shown. I added one part Skin-So-Soft to about 10 parts water as an after-bath rinse. The dogs were much harder to dry and their coats were slightly oily to the touch, but they stayed in beautiful condition all summer and smelled wonderful!

My natural program was so successful I plan to use it again next summer.

[This article was written by Vicky Jones for the Alaskan Malamute column of the AKC Gazette, April, 1996 issue.] [The natural products are available from the Natural Pet Care Company, 8050 Lake City Way, Seattle, WA 98115 A.M.]